Once the requisite quantity of material has been transferred, the method may also comprise the subsequent steps of:

f) displacing the valve portions such that the assembly conforms to its first configuration;

g) optionally cleaning the chamber;

h) optionally sterilising or decontaminating the chamber; and

i) disengaging the valve portions.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a coupling assembly comprising two coupling portions complementarily shaped such that the first can sealingly engage with and co-operate with the second to allow the movement of material therethrough, each coupling portion comprising a housing, a coupling seat and a coupling closure member moveable between a first position in which the coupling closure member is displaced from the coupling seat and the coupling is open, and a second position in which the coupling closure member co-operates with the coupling seat and the coupling is closed, a sealing surface formed therebetween, wherein the assembly has a first configuration in which the first and second coupling portions engage with one another, the coupling closure members being closed, and the coupling closure members being disposed a distance apart defining, with the housing, a chamber therebetween, which is capable of being sealed from the surrounding environment, having an inlet and an outlet through which sterilising medium may pass, and a second configuration in which the coupling closure members engage with one another and are movable from their first to their second position, and a third configuration in which the two valve portions are disengaged from one another, and wherein each coupling portion has means for cleaning the sealing surface between said coupling seat and coupling closure member.

By way of example only, a specific embodiment of the present invention will now be described, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a cross sectional side elevation of two valve portions of a valve assembly engaged with one another in an intermediate configuration in accordance with the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a cross sectional perspective view of a valve assembly in its first configuration in accordance with the present invention; and

Fig. 3 shows the edge of a valve closure member in accordance with the present invention.

Referring firstly to Figs. 1 to 3, the valve assembly 10 comprises two valve portions, an upper and lower valve portion 12,14, each having a valve housing indicated generally at 16, 18 which are generally annular and a valve closure member 20, 20' which is pivotally mounted within the housing. The valve closure member 20,20' is in the form of an annular disc and is provided with spindles